

## Introduction to Acts (Acts 1:1-3)

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### Today's passage (Acts 1:1-3)

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

### Answer the "W" Questions: Who? When? Why? What?

#### 1. Who wrote it? What do we know about the author?

##### A. Luke

- Originally "part 2" of a work written to Theophilus which comprised what we now know as Luke/Acts.
- The writings of the early church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome affirm Luke's authorship, as does the Muratorian Canon (ca. A.D. 170).<sup>2</sup>

##### B. Gentile

- This is inferred from the fact that he is not reckoned among those "who are from the circumcision" mentioned in Colossians 4 (Col. 4:11-14).<sup>4</sup>

##### C. Physician

- Paul refers to him as "Luke the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14)
- Sophistication of Luke's Greek

##### D. Relationship to the Apostles

- Not among the "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" whom he consulting with when writing his gospel account (Luke 1:2).
- Travels with Paul in Acts<sup>5</sup>
  - Use of first-person plural pronoun ("we") vs. third-person plural pronoun ("they").
  - He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey as far as Philippi (16:25-17:1) but did not share his persecution or leave the city, for here the third person they is used.
  - The first person "we" does not reappear until Paul comes to Philippi at the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:6), from which it is inferred that Luke spent the intervening time—a period of seven or eight years—in the city or neighborhood.
  - The "we" continues to the end of the book, that Luke remained with Paul during his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6-21:18), was that apostle's companion to Rome (Acts 27:1), sharing his shipwreck (Acts 28:2), and reaching the imperial city by way of Syracuse and Puteoli (Acts 28:12-16).
  - According to the epistles he continued to be one of Paul's "fellow workers" till the end of Paul's first imprisonment (Phil. 1:24; Col. 4:14).
  - The last glimpse of the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14) discovers him to be faithful amid general defection (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul, writing to Timothy, states "for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. *Only Luke is with me. . . .*" (2 Timothy 4:10-11)

##### E. Traditions concerning his death

- “Luke . . . is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.”<sup>6</sup>
- “the Emperor Constantius . . . about the year 359 [caused] the bodies of Andrew, the Apostle, Luke and Timothy, to be translated into a new Church at Constantinople.”<sup>7</sup>
- Others believe he died a natural death.

## 2. When was it written?

### A. When was Luke written?

ca. A.D. 60-61

### B. When was Acts written?

ca. A.D. 62<sup>9</sup>

### C. What is the historic span of the events recorded within the book?

- Pentecost (ca. A.D. 33)
- Paul's voyage to Rome (ca. A.D. 58)
- Spanning approximately 25 years of early church activity

Date (A.D.) <sup>10</sup>	Reference	Description
33	Acts 2	Pentecost
34 (early-mid)	Acts 5	Death of Ananias and Sapphira
36 (early)	Acts 8	Stephen martyred
36 (mid)	Acts 9	Paul's conversion
36-37	Acts 8	Philip's mission in Samaria and Judea
37	Gal. 1:17	Paul in Arabia
38	Acts 9	Paul escapes Damascus
39	Acts 10	Conversion of Cornelius
40	Acts 11	Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch
42 (late) / 43 (early)	Acts 12	James executed by Agrippa 1
43	Acts 12	James executed by Agrippa 1
45-48	Acts 13-14	First missionary journey
49 (January)	Acts 15	Jerusalem Council
49-51	Acts 15-18	Second missionary journey
52-55	Acts 18-21	Third missionary journey
55	Acts 24	Paul before Felix and Drusilla
57	Acts 25	Paul before Festus
57	Acts 25	Paul before Agrippa and Bernice
57-58	Acts 27-28	Paul's voyage to Rome
60	-	Paul released from custody; goes to Spain?

64-65	Tit. 1:5	Paul in Crete, where he leaves Titus
65	2Ti. 1:4	Paul in Ephesus, where he leaves Timothy
65	-	Paul in Macedonia
65-66	-	Paul in Nicopolis
66	-	Paul in Ephesus
66-67	-	Paul in Troas
67	2Ti. 1:16; 2:9	Paul arrested and sent to Rome
67 (late) / 68 (early)	2Ti. 4:7-8	Peter and Paul martyred at Rome

### 3. Who was it written to?

- Theophilus
- Probably a person of relatively high rank. Luke addresses Him as “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3 cf. Acts 23:26; 24:2; 26:25)
- Second century tradition places his residence in Antioch of Syria.<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Why was it written?

#### A. A continuation of the former account — the gospel of Luke

- “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach . . .” (Acts 1:1)
- A similar purpose to the former account
- “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” (Luke 1:1-4)

#### B. Luke/Acts may have originally been a single two-part work

- The 'hinge' between Luke and Acts is the ascension of Jesus, the physical removal of the literal body of Christ to sit at the right hand of the father.
- Continuing the gospel account (Luke) with an accurate historical record of the events which follow after Jesus' departure.

### 5. What is it about?

#### A. Titles: “Acts”, “Acts of the Apostles”, “Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles”

#### B. Transition: kingdom presentation (primarily to Israel), to general gospel message (to all nations)

- “you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in Judea [Jewish], and in all Samaria [Samaritan], and to the end of the earth [Gentiles]”

#### C. Answers a surprising question: how are Gentiles saved?

- The elaborate means by which Peter is motivated to minister to Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10).
- “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy

Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9).

- “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. “Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” (Acts 11:15-18)
- How might the Great Commission have initially been understood by Jewish ears?
  - “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every [Jewish?] creature” (Mark 16:15)
  - “Go therefore and make disciples of [Jews in?] all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)

## D. Certifies that God elected Paul as a Spirit-empowered twelfth Apostle

### I. Peter vs. Paul

- Similar to "Peter vs. John" comparisons within the gospels, but "Peter vs. Paul"
- Peter: with keys to the kingdom (Mat. 16:19), apostle to the circumcised (Jews, Gal. 2:8)
- Paul: late-comer, born out of due time (1Cor. 15:8), apostle to the uncircumcised (Gentiles, Rom. 11:13)

### II. Acts of Two Apostles Compared

What Peter did by apostolic authority so did Paul — this authenticates Paul's apostolic authority (2Co 11:5, 2Co 11:12; 2Co 11:11-12).<sup>13</sup>

1. Both heal a lame man, Peter (Acts 3:6-7), Paul (Acts 14:8-10).
2. Both heal through indirect media, Peter via a shadow (Acts 5:15), Paul via handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12).
3. Both impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, Peter (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 19:6).
4. Both oppose a sorcerer, Peter (Acts 8:20), Paul (Acts 13:6-12).
5. Both worshiped, Peter (Acts 10:25), Paul (Acts 14:11-13).
6. Both miraculously released from prison, Peter (Acts 12:7-11), Paul (Acts 16:26-29).
7. Both raise the dead, Peter (Acts 9:36-42), Paul (Acts 20:9-12).
8. Both render swift judgment, Peter (Ananias and Sapphira drop dead, Acts 5:4-5, 9-10), Paul (Elymas the sorcerer blinded, Acts 13:11).
9. Both have one complete sermon recorded by Luke, Peter (Acts 2:14-40), Paul (Acts 13:16-41)
10. Both entrusted with gospel to people groups, Peter to Jews (Gal. 2:7-8), Paul to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7-8).

## Luke as Historian

### 1. Accuracy of obscure historical details

Amid the multiplicity of changing official designations in the Roman empire at that time Luke moves with sure familiarity, not so simple a matter as it would be today with ready access to convenient works of reference. Luke knew that at the time with which he deals Cyprus, Achaia, and Asia were senatorial provinces governed by proconsuls (Acts 13:7; 18:12; 19:38); that Philippi, as a Roman colony, was administered by collegiate praetors, who were attended by lictors (Acts 16:20ff., 35ff.); that Thessalonica, like other cities of Macedonia, called its chief magistrates politarchs (Acts 17:6, 17:8). He was acquainted with the Areopagus at Athens (Acts 17:19, 17:22, 17:34); he knew that the leading men of the cities of Asia were called Asiarchs (Acts 19:31), that Ephesus enjoyed the honorary title of Neōkoros ("temple warden") of Artemis (Acts 19:35) and that the town clerk (grammateus) occupied

an important and responsible place in its municipal administration (Acts 19:35ff.). He knew that the chief official in Malta was called the first man (Acts 28:7).<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Previously unknown term validated by archaeology

An important inscription from [the Vardar Gate in Thessalonica], which is now in the British Museum, contains the word Gk. *politarches*, the same term that Luke used to designate the officials (RSV 'city authorities') before whom Jason was brought by the Mob (Acts 17:6). Since this word has not been found in Greek literature, its discovery on the Vardar Gate is an important evidence of Luke's accuracy as a historian.<sup>15</sup>

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## Interpretive Caveats

### 1. Everything recorded in Acts is normative Christian practice throughout history.

### 2. Nothing recorded in Acts should be considered as normative Christian practice today.

### 3. Literary position matches transitional character.

- *Between* the gospels and the epistles.
- Presentation of the kingdom, initially to Israel, now deferred.
- The formation of a new spiritual entity: the Church (much more to say about this later).

### 4. My background, transition out of Pentecostalism.

- Irony: Pentecostals often exhibit a deficient understanding of the events of Pentecost (Acts 2)
- Mistake historically unique events for ongoing practice to be considered normative for all Christians of all ages.
- An improved understanding of Acts was, in great measure, what God used to help me see the problems with Pentecostal practices which I myself was a party to.

### 5. Acts is primarily *descriptive* rather than *proscriptive*.

- Some events are unique to the historic setting.
- Other events are normative for the entire interadvent age.
- It is critical to discern which is which or considerable confusion and frustration results!

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## Sequence of Opening Passage

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.<sup>16</sup>

### 1. Gospels

“the former account . . . until the day in which He was taken up” - book of Luke, other gospels

### 2. Crucifixion and Resurrection

### 3. Forty days between resurrection and ascension

#### A. Infallible proofs given to the apostles

- Jesus entered a locked room (John 20:19)

- Showed His crucifixion wounds (Luke [24:39](#))
- Ate and drank with the disciples (Luke [24:41-43](#)).
- Repeated manifestations of His resurrected reality, “being seen by them during forty days” (Acts [1:3](#))

#### B. Protracted period of Instruction “speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God”

- It simply won't do to say the apostles remained clueless in their expectation for Israel's kingdom (Acts [1:6](#))!

### 4. Commandments

- A. **Matthew, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” (Matthew [28:19-20](#))**
- B. **Mark, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark [16:15](#))**
- C. **Luke, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke [24:46-49](#))**
- D. **Acts, “for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . . you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts [1:5-8](#))**
- E. **Summary: the Mandate of the Church during this age**
- Preach the gospel worldwide to all nations. The gospel message concerns repentance and remission of sins.
  - Baptize those who respond in faith.
  - Raise them up as disciples by teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.
  - Begin at Jerusalem, then expand to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
  - Wait for the baptism with the Holy Spirit before beginning this ministry.
    - An aside
      - If Jesus specified Spirit baptism as a prerequisite to proclaiming the gospel, how is that Charismatics and Pentecostals who understand Spirit baptism as a separate work after salvation, which they maintain not all Christians experience, expect all believers—even those who have not experienced the signs they associate with said baptism—to be active in evangelization?
      - This is just one of numerous inconsistencies we will encounter as we consider how Charismatics and Pentecostals interpret some of the events in the book of Acts.

### 5. Ascension!

- Israel's king and kingdom rejected: transition to the interadvent age.
- The kingdom deferred and delayed
  - “. . . [Jesus] spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and *because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately*. Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” (Luke [19:11-12](#))
- With the delay in the arrival of the kingdom, the continuation of the “Times of the Gentiles” (Luke [21:24](#))

- The time period which the "kingdom of heaven" parables communicated (e.g., Mat. 13).
  - Wheat and tares *grow* together (Mat. 13:30).
  - Mustard seed which *grows* into a tree (Mat. 13:32).
  - Hidden Leaven which *works its way* through three measures of meal (Mat. 13:33).
  - Dragnet cast into the see *gathering* some of every kind (Mat. 13:47).
  - Conditions of gradualism which prevail until the "end of the age" (Mat. 13:39-40,49; cf. Mat. 24:3; Mat. 28:20)
- Jesus has physically departed taking with Him the literal, physical "body of Christ."
  - "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)
- Jesus petitions the Father to send the Spirit to reside within every believer.
  - "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; *I will come to you*. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and *I in you*." (John 14:16-20)
  - "I will come to you", this is a *spiritual return* of Jesus to form the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:12-13)
  - A change of form of the body of Christ from the literal, physical, body of Jesus to the personal, spiritual indwelling of all believers by the Spirit of Jesus (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9-10).
  - This one-time historic transition is the source of great confusion and misinterpretation by those who ignore the historical transition: something we will return to again in more detail.

### The absence of Jesus: an age characterized by faith in the absence of sight.

- "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:24-29)

Thu Jun 12 19:11:51 2014



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#### Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 1:1-3
2. Ref-0089, 1630
3. Ref-0186, pp. 18-19n3
4. Some question whether Luke was a Gentile: ". . . when the Jews accused Paul of polluting the Temple by bringing Gentiles therein, why did they only allude to Trophimus? Why did they not include Luke who was also with Paul in the streets of Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-18, e.g., 'we', 'us')? The fact that Luke was not mentioned in the accusation is a most convincing indication that he was not a Gentile."<sup>3</sup>
5. Ref-0185, Paul
6. Ref-1306, par. 300
7. Ref-0849, pp. 207-208
8. Ref-0089, 1630

9. "Luke's silence about such notable events as the martyrdom of James, head of the Jerusalem church (A.D. 62 according to the Jewish historian Josephus), the persecution under Nero (A.D. 64), and the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) also suggests he wrote Acts before those events transpired."<sup>8</sup>
10. [Ref-1307](#), 342-345
11. [Ref-0185](#), Theophilus
12. "The only traditional information we possess about this person is that found in the 'Clementine Recognitions' (10.71), about the middle of the 2nd century: 'So that Theophilus, who was at the head of all the men in power at the city [of Antioch], consecrated, under the name of a church, the great basilica [the palace] in which he resided.' According to this, Theophilus was a great lord residing in the capital of Syria (Godet, Com., on Luke)."<sup>11</sup>
13. [Ref-0038](#), p 2:349b
14. [Ref-0008](#), F.F. Bruce, "Acts of the Apostles", 1:43b
15. [Ref-0008](#), p. 4:838
16. NKJV, Acts 1:1-3

## Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0008** Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979).
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0089** John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997).
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).
- Ref-0186** Floyd Nolen Jones, *Chronology of the Old Testament* (Woodlands, TX: KingsWord Press, 1999). ISBN: [0-9700328-2-X<sup>c</sup>](#).
- Ref-0849** Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of John* (Cave Junction, OR: Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, 1991). ISBN: [0-942487-02-8<sup>d</sup>](#).
- Ref-1306** John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563).
- Ref-1307** Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2011). ISBN: [978-0-7586-2799-5<sup>e</sup>](#).

## Links Mentioned Above

- a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-9700328-2-X>.
- d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-942487-02-8>.
- e - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-7586-2799-5>.